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ABSTRACT

Educators are under almost constant pressure to make schooling relevant to the lives of their students. Students, however, who are never exposed to the realms of possibility beyond their own immediate experience hardly have an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of education, since everyday experience tends to reinforce social inequalities. Students who are encouraged to assimilate new information into preexisting conceptions are unlikely to appreciate the insights offered by the academic disciplines. Teachers should be wary of introducing new ideas by pointing out their relation to everyday concepts and ways of thinking, because separation from everyday experiences favors reflection. Instead, school instruction should lure students to new capacities and understandings through unfamiliar subject matter. These adventures in learning can occur with guidance from a teacher, but without initial clarity about their purpose and promise. Possible objections to having schools provide breaks from everyday experience may arise from a desire for meaningfulness in instruction, may be based on research in cognition, or may be drawn from Dewey's philosophy of education. However, all these potential sources of objection can be seen as ultimately supporting the need for breaks from everyday experience: breaks that are necessary for children if they are to reap the benefits of schooling. (Author/AC)

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# BREAKING WITH EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE FOR GUIDED ADVENTURES IN LEARNING

Robert E. Floden and
Margret Buchmann

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Abstract

Educators find themselves under almost constant pressure to make schooling relevant to the lives of their students. Yet such an emphasis on familiarity may frustrate the attainment of two central goals of schooling. Students who are never exposed to the realms of possibility beyond their own immediate experience can hardly be viewed as having an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of an education, and students who are encouraged to assimilate new information into preexisting conceptions are unlikely to appreciate the insights offered by the academic disciplines. Possible objections arising from a desire for meaningfulness in instruction, from research in cognition, or from Dewey's philosophy of education can all be seen as ultimately supporting this need for breaks with everyday experience, breaks necessary for all children--not just those from certain socioeconomic backgrounds--if they are truly to reap the benefits of schooling.

# BREAKING WITH EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE FOR GUIDED ADVENTURES IN LEARNING[1]

Robert E. Floden and Margret Buchmann[2]

During this century, U.S. schools have increasingly come to be seen in a continuum of experience that spans family, community, and the world of work (e.g., Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). Secondary school teachers are urged to make courses relevant to their students' lives and expected careers. Elementary school teachers are advised to stress the utility of mathematics and spelling. Many educators assume that without such links students will not be motivated and will have difficulty learning.

Emphasizing continuity with everyday life, however, can confuse regard for students and their interests with accepting all personal beliefs and overly stressing the practical relevance of school learning. Emphasizing this continuity also conflicts with two central goals of schooling: promoting equal opportunity and disciplinary learning. For unless students can break with their everyday experience in thought, they cannot see the extraordinary range of options for living and thinking; and unless students can give up many commonsense beliefs, they may find it impossible to learn disciplinary concepts that describe the world in diverse, surprising ways.

> Everyone lives in a particular, restricted time and place,
>
> but school and university are places apart where a declared learner is emancipated from the limitations of his local circumstances and from the wants he may happen to have acquired,

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[1]This paper is a revised version of Breaking With Everyday Experience (1987), Occasional Paper No. 103, and will be a chapter in the forthcoming book Detachment and Concern: Topics in the Philosophy of Teaching and Teacher Education, edited by Margret Buchmann and Robert E. Floden (New York: Teachers College Press).

[2]Robert E. Floden, professor of teacher education and educational psychology at Michigan State University, was a senior researcher with the Conceptual Analysis of Teaching Project. Margret Buchmann, professor of teacher education at MSU, is coordinator of the project.

> and is moved by intimations of what he has never yet dreamed. (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 24)

By emphasizing continuity with everyday life, educators destroy some of the strengths of schooling. If family, job, church, or other social institutions were to take responsibility for developing children's power to break with everyday experience in an environment sheltered for purposes of learning, the school's role would be less important. Currently, though, no other institution takes that responsibility, and schools seem to lose sight of that role. Hence, many students do not learn to see the limits and idiosyncracies of the given.

We aim to recover the meaning of school as a place set apart, where truth and the social order do not coincide. To this purpose, we examine breaks with experience as adventures in learning, show why they are required for equality and disciplinary knowledge, and discuss how educators can foster such breaks. We consider objections to our argument that can be derived from the call for meaningfulness in instruction, research on cognition, and aspects of Dewey's philosophy of education. Central to our argument is the contention that, in the words of John Dewey (1916/1944), it is

> the office of the school environment . . . to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment. (p. 20)

## Why Breaks With Everyday Experience Are Necessary for Everyone

Everyday life is not set up for learning that transcends its own boundaries and suspends its immediate purposes. It is rich in experiences that are vivid and compelling, while appearing self-evident in their meaning. All of these attributes are double-edged swords. While giving contextual learning power, they also restrict people's scope of vision, exaggerate the

reliability and importance of close-to-home experience, and make it difficult to grasp concepts from the disciplines of knowledge.

When someone is in what phenomenologists describe as the natural attitude, the world feels centered in time and space around oneself and objects are important mostly for achieving personal ends. The structure and reality of this egocentric world are taken for granted and ordinarily not made the object of reflection. Immersion in the natural attitude supports the false belief that the actual and the possible are identical and that local perspectives are unassailable. Just as it seems that one's individual perspective gets at the nature of things, so it appears that one's social or ethnic group has the proper views. These sociocentric and ethnocentric natural attitudes are even more powerful.

Sociocentrism can affect scientists just as it affects garment workers; ethnocentrism can affect whites as much as Hispanics. No individual or group is immune to the deceptions of the natural attitude. People go about their lives assuming that <u>their</u> group's patterns of acting and thinking are not open to question; these patterns are so familiar that they become invisible. When such patterns are not seen, alternatives are not envisioned either. Even if alternatives could be considered, the natural attitude gives undue weight to the familiar, which is both vivid and readily available in memory (see Nisbett & Ross, 1980).

Limitations and distortions make it important to break with the natural attitude and to achieve greater distance from egocentric and sociocentric patterns of acting and thinking. Educational philosophers characterize this change of perspective as a move toward objectivity (see Green, 1971; Peters, 1966). Greater objectivity means moving away from the point of view of a

particular self or social group, living in some definite time and place. The crux is that objectivity means seeing the world not from within but, as it were, from without. One's self or one's group is not seen as the center of things, but as part of a larger, variegated picture.

Objectivity also allows seeing circumstances and phenomena from more than one perspective, varying in distance to the contingent self. Another part of objectivity's appeal stems from the sense that breaking with the natural attitude implies responding to the ideal of truth:

> We flee the subjective under the pressure of an assumption that everything must be something not to any point of view, but in itself. To grasp this by detaching more and more from our own point of view is the unreachable ideal at which the pursuit of objectivity aims. (Nagel, 1979, p. 208)

Moving toward objectivity requires being able both to recognize other perspectives and to select those perspectives that are most appropriate for a matter at hand.

The detachment presupposed by objectivity is not indifference, but rather the sense that many modes of thinking and acting familiar to oneself seem strange to other people and that some of one's ideas and actions may have to be changed for good reasons. However, we usually are not ready to abandon the natural attitude "without having experienced a specific shock which compels us to break through the limits of this 'finite' province of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one" (Schutz, 1945/1962, p. 231). This shift may happen in dreaming, watching a theater production, switching from one language to another, or having an adventure.

The image of an adventure provides a metaphor for educative breaks with experience. An adventure interrupts the integrated consistency and predictable flow of life and thought. An adventure may be educative if it

also centrally connects with a person's sense of self, capacities, and developing understandings. As Georg Simmel (1911/1959) puts it,

> An adventure . . . occurs outside the usual continuity of this life. Nevertheless, it is distinct from all that is accidental and alien, merely touching life's outer shell. While it falls outside the context of life, it falls, with this same movement, as it were, back into that context again . . .; it is a foreign body in our existence which is yet somehow connected with the center. (p. 243)

Such adventures, like educative breaks with everyday experience, are linked to the springs of human learning.

Breaks with everyday experience are more likely to be educative if they occur in a setting created to make the most of deviations from the usual or seemingly fated course. Ordinary life, however, does not screen breaks for worthwhile directions and effects, warding off those that are untimely or damaging. In a sense, every self-chosen action means that "a human being lets go a mooring and puts out to sea on a . . . largely unforeseen course" (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 23). Schools can turn some vicissitudes of existence and ordeals of consciousness into guided adventures in learning. The separateness of school can shelter youngsters from the enveloping nature of the taken-for-granted and the press of immediacy, so that they can confront the world they inhabit through conscious knowing and valuing.

Everyday Experience Reinforces Inequality

More often than not, life teaches people that they have to fit themselves into the scheme of things. As part of their socialization, children learn what to expect from life. They learn how they are expected to act and how other people will act toward them. They adopt notions of what is true and right, often without much capacity for judgment and reflection. Such

expectations stretch into the future of jobs, families, and community roles--and they are not the same for all children.

Some youngsters see themselves progressing through high school, university, and professional school, imagining vacations in the Caribbean and a condominium in the mountains; others plan to escape from school at the earliest opportunity, to help out at home or save their overtime pay for a new car. Some envision campaign contributions to politicians who will protect their interests; others expect to give their votes to whichever party will keep their streets in good repair; and some see no point in voting.

To have more equal opportunities, children must imagine themselves in futures not determined by their immediate environments and local beliefs. No matter how much a school is able to raise a student's achievement test scores, the increase does little to equalize opportunities unless students can see and act on the possibilities created. Understanding what happens to oneself and envisioning what could be requires more objective perspectives and lively imagination.

Everyday Concepts Frustrate Disciplinary Learning

The academic disciplines provide perspectives that draw on accumulated, systematically tested, and creatively imagined human experiences. They are also guides in judgment, preventing people from falling into the relativistic trap of thinking that all perspectives have equal merit. Arguments for disciplinary understandings as a central educational goal resemble our general case for breaks with everyday experience. As with equal opportunity, acquiring such distancing and liberating understandings is frustrated by relying on everyday experience.

Students enter school with concepts and methods for understanding and acting on the world around them. They have ideas about physical principles and about people. But many of these naive conceptions conflict with disciplinary understandings. Moreover, some disciplinary concepts do not refer to everyday experience at all. When children encounter science in school, this subject conveys fascinatingly new and different information about the world: It is the sun, and not the earth, which stands still; hammers dissolve into electrons and protons; water is actually a combination of gases; and so on. There are also concepts with no counterparts in the everyday world, such as latent heat.

Because of the human tendency to try to incorporate new experience into old frameworks (see Mayer, 1979), students often assimilate school learning into their naive conceptions, even when those conceptions are not appropriate (Nussbaum & Novak, 1976; Clement, 1982). Thus, many students may continue to believe that the earth is flat or that continual force is needed to maintain constant velocity. This tendency is so strong that everyday conceptions persist, even in the face of instruction that contradicts them (Eaton, Anderson, & Smith, 1984). In part, their robustness may be due to the fact that everyday conceptions have served students well outside school (Viennot, 1979).

To learn the disciplines, students need instruction helping them to see the limits and distortions in their everyday conceptions, not instruction encouraging them to think that disciplinary concepts are mere variants of their everyday beliefs (Anderson & Roth, 1989). People are beginning to understand the conditions under which students will give up everyday beliefs and replace them with disciplinary concepts. One prominent model of

conceptual change learning suggests that a sense of conflict and dissatisfaction with old conceptions is an important prerequisite (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982).

## Effecting Breaks With Everyday Experience

If schools are to develop students' capacities to break with everyday experience for purposes of learning, changes in the content and methods of instruction are needed. The work of Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978) lends support to instructional approaches that strive for greater separation from--not more continuity with--students' everyday experiences. Vygotsky concludes from his studies of school learning that children do not acquire systematic understanding of academic subjects by drawing on the concepts they bring with them. Children are not consciously aware of these concepts and thus cannot work with them abstractly. For example, concepts of family relationships (e.g., brother, sister, mother) can be applied to concrete situations, but not to answering abstract questions of kinship (e.g., the identity of a brother's father's sister). Children eventually become conscious of these logical relations, but may be confused because everyday concepts are "saturated with experience" (Vygotsky, 1934/1962, p. 108). By contrast, abstract concepts (e.g., the concept of exploitation) are learned consciously; their lack of concrete reference allows children to keep conceptual relations straight.

Teachers should be wary of introducing students to new ideas by pointing out their relations to everyday concepts and ways of thinking. Instead, teaching should often begin with material divorced from everyday life. Links to experience can eventually be made, but within the abstract conceptual system. Vygotsky (1934/1962) contends that this instructional approach--favoring awareness of one's own thinking--also favors reflection:

> School instruction induces the generalizing kind of perception and thus plays a decisive role in making the child conscious of his own mental processes. Scientific concepts, with their hierarchical system of interrelationships, seem to be the medium within which awareness and mastery first develop, to be transferred later to other concepts and other areas of thought. Reflective consciousness comes to the child through the portals of scientific concepts. (p. 92)

Acquiring the ability for systematic reflection is a process of several steps; in it an adult takes responsibility for directing the student's learning. First the child is led through the steps of some task, without being able to do the task alone or, presumably, understanding why the individual steps are being taken. As the child learns to repeat these steps habitually, she learns to do the task independently. In a study of mothers teaching their preschool children, Wertsch (1979) examines how children make the transition from adult-directed performance to independent appropriate action. Wertsch suggests that, because children are motivated to make sense of what they do, being guided to perform a strange task creates the incentive for moving toward new capacities and understandings. School instruction could likewise lure students into unfamiliar subject matter.

Adventures in learning can occur with guidance from a teacher, but without initial clarity about their purpose and promise. This argument applies to learning in the liberal arts as well as to learning scientific or moral concepts. Universities may attract students on the supposition of career benefits, but they actually deliver human goods--including the capacity to stand back from the particulars of everyday experience--that students will appreciate only after they have made them their own (Peters, 1966). Learning what good literature is and what it can give (e.g., in offering multiple and deepening readings of life and people) may depend on a leap into reading good

literature. Similarly, students must acquire habits of moral thought and action before they can become autonomous moral agents.

To conclude, in many areas of school instruction, students can transcend given ways of thinking and acting by first acquiring habits whose components they can imitate and practice but whose purposes they initially do not understand. Such transcendence requires schooling that breaks with the natural attitude and everyday understandings. While this separation may forfeit immediate relevance, there are distinctive educational gains. However, the popularity of continuity with everyday experience as a principle of curriculum and instruction derives, in part, from cultural and commonsense beliefs that identify the value of education with its practical usefulness. This view of what makes education valuable in part underlies the call for "meaningfulness" in school instruction.

## Should Not Schooling Be Meaningful?

A seemingly straightforward objection to having schools provide breaks with everyday experience is that such breaks will make schooling less meaningful. Instructional content that is not meaningful, people argue, will be difficult for students to understand and remember; they will also not be motivated to learn it. This objection to our case for educative breaks for purposes of learning rests on the ambiguity of the term meaningful, which has at least three senses. To call something meaningful can signify that it is related to prior knowledge, practically relevant, or closely tied to everyday life.

In its first sense, meaningfulness is important for learning; but this sense does not support an objection to breaks with everyday experience, for educative breaks do not require discontinuity with all knowledge. Breaks with

everyday experience do lead to loss of meaningfulness in the second and third senses, but the educational value of practical relevance and continuity with everyday life is debatable. Moreover, getting access to new concepts and meanings is not inconsistent with opening up new systems of practical relevancies, as well as creating new patterns of thought and action that grow to be "close to home" (e.g., habits of reflection). The force of the meaningfulness objection seems based on the fallacy of equivocation: using the first sense to argue that meaningfulness is crucial, then drawing on the commonsense appeal of the other senses to suggest that breaks with everyday knowledge are not defensible.

Relationships to Prior Knowledge

Meaningful instruction in the first sense--as instruction relating to prior knowledge--is endorsed by common sense and psychology (see, e.g., Ausubel, 1968; Bruner, 1972; Resnick, 1987). Smith (1975), for example, writes in a cognitive psychology textbook for teachers that a central requirement for learning is that "there must be a point of contact between what the student is expected to know and what he knows already" (p. 9). It is trivially true that things to be learned must in some way be related to some prior knowledge. Research supporting this sense of meaningfulness relies on interpretations of "related to" that encompass a wide variety of relationships, from simple associations to conceptual links. Thus people's capacity to memorize a list of objects may be increased by imagining a familiar walk and associating each item on the list with a place passed during this mental journey. Research on memory for nonsense syllables constitutes another example of the broad interpretation psychologists give to "relationships to prior knowledge."

The argument for guided adventures in learning would be damaged if educative breaks with experience were meaningless in this first sense. But the breaks we advocate are with everyday knowledge, not with all knowledge. As psychological studies of meaningfulness show, one can meet the general requirement for relationships to prior knowledge by interpreting "relationships" and "prior knowledge" in diverse ways. Having lessons relate to disciplinary knowledge or conceptual systems acquired in earlier instruction fits this sense of meaningfulness.

The criterion of relation to prior knowledge is not an all-or-nothing affair. Although psychologists occasionally write as if meaningfulness (in this sense) were dichotomous, "there are differing degrees of meaningfulness, depending on the extent to which the material to be learned can be related to what the learner knows already" (Smith, 1975, p. 160). In working with methods and content different from everyday experience, students may begin with only a faint idea of what it all means, but that beckoning glimmer of understanding could suffice to make the instruction meaningful. A gradual deepening and spreading of significant relationships is consistent with the picture of educative breaks described earlier.

Practical Relevance

In its sense of practical relevance, meaningfulness is commonly considered a prime source of motivation for learning. This sense merges making instruction meaningful into demonstrating to students that instructional content can be put to use outside of school, either now or in the future. Meaningfulness in this second sense depends on an instrumental view of school knowledge and an understanding of value in terms of utility. Since practical relevance implies integrated relations with everyday

activities, this interpretation of meaningfulness is inconsistent with the educative breaks we advocate. If practical relevance were decisive for valuable and successful instruction, it would support a serious objection to making schools break with everyday experience. Developing motivation to learn, however, does not depend on showing the practical relevance of schoolwork and may, in fact, be hindered by such an emphasis.

In his analysis of the literature on instructional motivation, Brophy (1983) emphasizes the difference between two types of motivation. With exogenous motivation, students complete tasks for reasons not linked to what they learn from engaging in the task; with endogenous motivation, students are motivated by the tasks themselves and seek to learn what they can from engaging in those tasks. Linking school tasks to activities outside school tends to develop exogenous motivation at the expense of endogenous motivation. Telling students about the inherent value of the tasks tends to develop motivation to learn. Hence the fact that breaks with everyday experience fail to provide meaningfulness in the second sense supports, rather than undercuts, the argument for breaks with everyday experience for purposes of learning.

In its third sense of close ties to everyday life, meaningfulness is a characteristic of instruction that builds on familiar patterns of thought and action. Actually, this is a specialized version of the first sense of meaningfulness. Breaks with everyday experience, by definition, run counter to this requirement. Yet such meaningfulness has considerable commonsense appeal and seems to be supported by cross-cultural cognitive studies and research on everyday cognition.

## Texts Versus Local Knowledge

Research on everyday cognition in Western and other cultures describes and appraises everyday modes of thought in ways that contest the value of breaking with them (see, e.g., Rogoff & Lave, 1984). Scribner and Cole (1973), as an important example, argue for "bridg[ing] the gulf between school and practical life" (p. 558) in both the methods and content of instruction. What is needed, they write, is

> to move everyday life into the school so that its subject matter and activities deal with some of the same aspects of social and physical reality that the pupils confront outside of school. . . . Education must be stripped from the schoolroom and made instrumental in traditional settings. (p. 558)

Other cognitive anthropologists study everyday thinking in situations like grocery shopping (Lave, Murtaugh, & de la Rocha, 1984), navigating (Gladwin, 1970), or selling fish (Hallpike, 1979). Their work draws attention to the many unschooled abilities people have and to their general capacity for making sense of things. Like the third sense of meaningfulness, this research tradition emphasizes the importance of building on everyday modes of knowing in school learning. Like supporters of the second sense of meaningfulness, these scholars suggest that practical relevance is necessary to make learning worthwhile and motivating. Surprisingly, this research grows out of a line of work that tends to support our argument for breaks with everyday experience.

Cross-cultural studies of thinking often focus on whether learning a written language is a central feature in learning to think abstractly (e.g., Goody & Watt, 1963/1968; Scribner & Cole, 1981). This research tradition spells out the advantages of breaks with everyday experience. Instruction based on text can put people into contact with the unfamiliar, with what is different and distant in time, place, and culture; the oral mode tends to

preserve continuity with local experience, with what can be seen, touched, or heard. Bruner and Olson (1977-78) link this distinction between oral and text-based instruction to differences between everyday learning and the text-based mode of learning that characterizes schooling. They argue that skills for working with written material have three interrelated advantages.

First, these skills enable students to see their current world as just one of a number of possibilities. Second, text-based instruction allows for more flexible and general application of what is learned. When learning is closely tied to the local context, it is more difficult to adapt to changing circumstances or to strike out in new directions. Third, the skills learned through text-based instruction increase students' tendency to be analytic. Oral lore requires memorization and is structured for this purpose; oral arguments are hard to pin down and often appeal to authority and the emotions. Through written argument, analysis, and critique, people can comprehend and judge reality and the claims of others.

However, writing can be closely tied to everyday life, and oral instruction can provide the basis for reflection or for thinking about an unknown audience. The important distinction may be whether learners assume the role of spectator or participant (see Britton, 1982) rather than whether the instructional mode is written or oral; in other words, it may be taking a more or less objective stance that makes the difference. Also, scholars interested in the "great divide" between oral and written literacy have recently concluded that it is not writing per se that benefits students, but some of the practices associated with formal schooling.

In their seminal study of the effects of written literacy, Scribner and Cole (1981) compared illiterate, literate-but-unschooled, and literate-and-

schooled groups within the Vai people of Liberia to determine whether literacy accounted for, among other things, people's tendency to think analytically. They found that such thinking was barely more prevalent in the literate-but-unschooled group than in the illiterate group they studied. Those in the schooled group, however, were significantly more analytic than those in the other two groups. Scribner and Cole attribute these effects to school instruction that is based (at least in part) on requiring students to describe their mental processes and give reasons for what they say. Teachers ask questions such as, "What made you give that answer? How do you know? Go to the board and explain what you did" (p. 255). These school practices are consistent with our emphasis on objectivity and educational content considered in its own right, rather than in terms of continuity or practical relevance.

For what reasons, then, are these researchers so intent on tying schooling to everyday life? Why does Olson (1977), for example, describe schools as "bookish, detached from reality, devoid of personal meaning, and useless practically" (p. 69) and conclude his comparison of oral and written modes of instruction with an impassioned plea to reduce schools' reliance on text? Or why do Scribner and Cole (1973, p. 558), after enumerating the benefits of instruction removed from local contexts, argue that schools should strengthen their ties to people's everyday experience?

These scholars may be ambivalent because of the costs entailed in breaking with everyday experience, even for purposes of learning. These costs have been recognized since Plato, who was torn between recognizing the analytical value of written argument and feeling nostalgic about the sense of continuity inherent in oral tradition (Goody & Watt, 1963/1968). Some intellectuals, such as Rousseau and his followers, continue to yearn for "the

peasant's simple but cohesive view of life, the timelessness of his living in the present, the unanalytic spontaneity that comes with an attitude to the world that is one of absorbed and uncritical participation" (p. 61).

If these primeval attitudes are goods, breaking with them brings losses that will be accelerated by literacy and education. The question is, however, to what extent an orientation toward the present and an absence of dispositions for analysis <u>are</u> goods and--if they are--to what extent these goods may conflict with other valuable dispositions, such as exercising prudent foresight and distancing reflection. Usually, people praising the simplicity of others--children, "natives," working-class people--are not themselves spontaneous and uncritical, nor members of such groups, sharing their typical experiences. People who luxuriate in the communal, richly passionate lives of others are themselves practitioners of the <u>reflective</u> life, aware of its value. The praise of the unlettered by the highly educated is, as Richard Rodriguez (1982) learned at college, a primary theme of elitist nostalgic literature.

Ambivalent scholars may also believe that breaks with everyday experience will contribute to existing social and educational inequalities. Where breaks are found, they are typically breaks for working-class and minority children that are implemented in ways that seem to exclude them from the benefits of instruction (Labov, 1982; Philips, 1983). John Dewey's complex position on continuity in education seems similarly shaped by worries about what schools will actually do to provide breaks.

## <u>Dewey's Ambivalence About Continuity</u>

Like the cognitive researchers, Dewey recognized the value of breaks with everyday experience, yet sometimes seemed ambivalent. He, too, may have

emphasized continuity with everyday experience in part because he feared that schools would divorce instruction from experience without using breaks as an opportunity to expand students' horizons. Dewey was incensed by the ways many schools blinded students to new ideas, destroyed their desire to learn, and killed their interest in books. He was also disturbed by the apparently deteriorating significance of community in the United States.

For the most part, our argument is consistent with Dewey's positions. Apparent differences arise in the strongly worded essays Dewey wrote in opposition to the school practices of his day. Based on these statements, Dewey is often considered a champion of tight ties between home and school. However, he took a complex position on breaks with everyday experience. To understand why Dewey is considered an enemy of breaks, consider, for instance, what he writes in his early, emphatic, widely reprinted pamphlet, "My Pedagogic Creed": "The school life should grow gradually out of the home life; . . . it should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home" (Dewey, 1897/1959b, p. 23). Forty years later, in Experience and Education, Dewey (1938) avers that, for an educator, "connection with life-experiences" is a "fundamental principle" (p. 95), and "connectedness in growth must be his constant watchword" (p. 90). Spanning the period of most of Dewey's educational writings, these quotations suggest a fervent commitment to connections with everyday experience in education.

Yet Dewey's view of schooling also centrally features the advantages we have attributed to the power to make breaks. Educative schooling "opens a way to a kind of experience which would not be accessible to the young, if they were left to pick up their training in informal association with others, since books and the symbols of knowledge are mastered" (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 8).

Dewey (1902/1959a) also links learning academic subjects to acquiring a sense of intellectual method and objectivity, or the

> ability to view facts impartially and objectively; that is, without reference to their place and meaning in one's own experience. It [i.e., a sense of intellectual method and objectivity] means capacity to analyze and to synthesize. It means highly matured intellectual habits. (p. 94)

Dewey also saw education as an adventure; experiences are not educative if they give students only "greater skill and ease in dealing with things with which they are already familiar" (Dewey, 1938, p. 90).

Moreover, Dewey believed that schooling ought not to be closely tied to definite future occupations, and he attacked plans for vocational education aimed to fit workers into existing jobs; rather, such education should make workers the "masters of their own industrial fate" (1915, p. 42). Dewey wanted to integrate occupational concerns into the education of <u>all</u> students, not to substitute disciplinary knowledge by occupational skills for some groups.

Both Dewey's emphasis on reflection and his conception of education as extending the limits of experience resonate with our call for breaks. We disagree, however, with Dewey's belief that education requires beginning with everyday experience. Although Dewey insists that instruction must use knowledge of the local world as "an intellectual starting point for moving out into the unknown, not [as] an end in itself" (1916/1944, p. 212), he also maintains that instruction must begin close to home and maintain continuity with everyday experience as other realms are explored. But, as Vygotsky argues, sticking to everyday experience can make it more difficult for students to learn new concepts or become reflective.

By pointing to the problems schools have created when they provided instruction divorced from everyday experiences, Dewey articulates a plea for continuity that has emotional power and wide appeal. Yet any educational reform may be carried out poorly or in self-defeating ways. This is a reason to urge care in making changes, not a reason to abandon the implications of one's analysis or worthwhile aims of learning distinctive to schooling.

## Educative Breaks Are Needed for All Children

In stressing the drawbacks of schooling tied to close-to-home experience, there is a danger that our argument could work to the disadvantage of working-class or minority students who currently achieve less, on the average, in U.S. schools. If providing breaks makes school more difficult for students already at a disadvantage, it might create yet another situation in which middle-class students reap the greatest benefits of schooling. One explanation of this situation is that typical schooling is closer to the everyday experiences of middle-class students than those of other children (see Heath, 1982). Some therefore argue that, to eliminate the advantages for middle-class children, school should be made equally familiar to all children. In other words, they advocate relying more on instructional content and methods that are tied to the home experiences of children from working-class or minority groups (see, e.g., Au & Jordan, 1981).

Our argument, however, questions the educational value of everyday experience for <u>all</u> students. It is not directed just toward those groups whose home experience is already largely discontinuous with what is expected in schools. Furthermore, while middle-class homes may provide children with concepts and ways of talking that help them succeed in school, that is by no means the same thing as possessing the ability to break with the natural

attitude in mind-opening ways. We contend that all students should have adventures in learning, not that all students should come to share the everyday experiences of one segment of the population.

We have belabored the drawbacks of everyday experience, in part because its constraints and distortions are not sufficiently understood, especially among U.S. educators. Yet for detachment, as for most things, virtue lies in moderation and appropriateness; objective pictures of the world are only partial, appropriate for some, but not all, purposes. Transcending personal and group experiences leaves behind ways of knowing and being that have intrinsic worth. Schools should therefore help students to move toward objectivity, but without denying that everyday experiences have their place and meaning.

Withdrawal from connection with surrounding things has to be balanced with engagement and relatedness. Since everyday experience tends to support subjective and local perspectives, it is itself unlikely to provide a balance. Supporting students in the continuing effort to find that balance presupposes their ability to break with everyday experience. Yet this ability does not imply a permanent divorce from the everyday world, nor a loss of all personal or local meaning. As Richard Rodriguez (1982) says in his poised and lucid educational autobiography, although learning to separate from home experience is painful, it can also provide the distance needed to understand--and perhaps ultimately return to embrace--that experience: "If, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact" (p. 72).

## Weighing Gains and Losses

Every gain is a loss of some kind. Breaks with everyday experience are necessary for helping all children to think and act with a sense of methods and ideas that reach beyond the immediately given. The concept of adventure indicates that everyday life occasionally includes such breaks for people. Public schooling is, however, the primary North American institution in which attention can be paid to equality of opportunity in assuring educative breaks with experience, in which the frequency and nature of these breaks can be controlled in the interests of learning, and in which students can be sheltered from the press of everyday life to bring that learning to fruition. Although discontinuity is not in itself an educational goal or guarantee of worthwhile learning, schools are unlikely to further equal opportunity and disciplinary understanding if their curricula remain within a continuum of experiences spanning home and work.

While the ability to make breaks with everyday experience is valuable for all, such breaks come at a cost. Equalizing opportunities often disconnects individuals from their backgrounds. Objectivity brings progressively greater distance from things intimately known and cherished. In general, education means losing the sense that life is seamless and whole and the comforting--but false--assumption that things, once learned, are safe from change and challenge. The attractions of close ties to everyday experience and local traditions must be weighed against the benefits of breaking away from such experience for purposes of equality of opportunity and learning. Our conclusions bring to mind the words of Israel Scheffler (1985):

> The capability to learn is the capability to alter what one is and has been; it places the present at risk. Made quite general, such capability is consonant with the vision of a democratic society, in which learning is not restricted but opened wide, in which the

risks of learning are more than justified by the human quality of the community sustaining them. (p. 122)

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